



Minutes

Name of meeting	<u>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS</u>
Date and time	THURSDAY, 23 JULY 2020 COMMENCING AT 5.00PM
Venue	COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT
Present	Cllrs Vanessa Churchman (Chairman), George Cameron, Rodney Downer, Paul Fuller, Stephen Hendry, Karl Love, Matthew Price
Co-opted Members (voting)	Shaun Arnold (Parent Governor)
Cabinet Member	Cllr Paul Brading
Officers Present	Stuart Ashley; Steve Crocker, Dr Patricia Hannam, Brian Pope, Charlotte Sadler, Paul Thistlewood
Apologies	Rob Sanders (Dioceses Representative)

1. **Minutes**

RESOLVED :

THAT the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2020 be confirmed.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Stephen Hendry declared an interest as he was a governor at Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Shaun Arnold declared he was a governor at Dover Park Primary and Medina College

Councillor Vanessa Churchman declared an interest as she was governor at Haylands Primary School.

Councillor Matthew Price declared an interest as he is a governor at Barton Primary School.

3. Covid-19 – Response and Recovery

Children’s Social care and Education

The Committee was provided with a presentation giving an overview of the actions taken by officers during the pandemic relating children’s social care, education, strategic development and capital delivery, early years and school transport. The Director of Children’s Services, together with the Assistant Director of Children and Families and the Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion advised members of how services were adapted to meet the challenges created by Covid-19.

- A) The Director advised that based on guidance from public health services remained in Phase One which was ‘business as usual but doing things differently’. The committee was informed that at one point 22% of the social care workforce was off however this did not mean they were unable to work; some staff members were able to work from home while self-isolating. Members were advised that all statutory time scales for visits and meetings remained the same and this was achieved by the increased use of technology. Phone calls and Apps such as Microsoft Teams were used in place of some meetings. This meant social workers could still visually see the children and speak to families, check living spaces like children’s bedrooms and check cupboards and fridges for adequate food. Following a question regarding a backlog of work with the courts the committee was advised that there wasn’t a backlog as the courts remained open and virtual hearings were still held.

The committee heard that at the start of lockdown referrals into social care dropped. However, this figure was expected to go back up when children returned to school.. Numbers in care were higher than usual as children were not leaving the system. Urgent child protection visits for the most vulnerable cases still had face to face contact with social workers who were given Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the police were also in attendance. The hard work of Social Workers and Foster Carers was commended and it was recognised they had gone above and beyond during this time. It was acknowledged that hybrid meetings had worked well and were likely to continue as the older children in the system, typically teenagers, engaged very well virtually.

Several questions were raised by members questioning the effectiveness of virtual meetings, how the Island’s statistics compared with those nationally and how social workers had been supported while working out of the office environment. Response were provided by the officers.

Support was given to schools with regard to the approach to home learning. Schools were required to adapt to home learning quickly and set family friendly tasks suitable for children without access to a computer. 300 laptops were delivered to children on the Isle of Wight without access to technology. Children in year 10 without a laptop also had one provided. It was highlighted that the emphasis was on remote learning and not on-line learning. The Island had the highest number of pupils attending in the country. This was a demonstration of how well headteachers knew families thereby ensuring that the needs of children were met as far as

possible. The return of primary pupils was less complex to deal with unlike that for secondary schools where pupil bubbles had to account for the range of subjects involved.

It was too early to tell if the numbers of children that were home educated would increase as the result of Covid-19. Ofsted had indicated that it would not undertake any inspections during next term but were keen however to ascertain what could be learnt from how local authorities coped with the delivery of services during the past 4 months. Officers were of the opinion that for most of the time it has been business as usual but with a different approach.

Members noted that although there had been circumstances whereby Christ the King and Cowes Enterprise College the need for each to deal with a single incident of a member who had tested positive for Covid-19 there had been no cases in the other secondary schools nor any of the primary schools.

Members noted the situation regarding works to school buildings, the impact on early years providers, future guidance on schools returning in September 2020 and implications for home to school transport and admission arrangements.

RESOLVED :

THAT all staff in children's social care, education, schools, support staff, pupils and their families be formally thanked for their hard work in maintaining a high standard of service through such a difficult period.

B) School Life during Covid-19

The Head Teacher from Haylands primary school, Mrs Lisa Nicholson, gave a presentation on how her school responded to the lockdown and how it remained open for the children of key workers, vulnerable children and children with an Educational Healthcare Plan (EHCP). 43% of the school population attended after 1 June 2020 and these were in 14 separate bubbles. Welfare checks were still undertaken on those pupils who were not able to attend school. Special activities were arranged for those pupils in transition to secondary school. An outline was given of the arrangements planned for when all pupils returned in September 2020.

RESOLVED:

THAT the School be congratulated for its response to Covid-19 and the support provided to pupils, families and staff.

4. Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report 2018-19

Dr Patricia Hannam presented the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE) annual report to the committee. Members were advised that in 2006/07 SACRE's membership had been made up of purely Christian representatives there were now representatives from all religious denominations, such as Church of England, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Humanist.

SACRE's role was to advise the education authority on what its approach to the delivery of religious education in schools and to monitor what was taught. The committee heard the importance of Religious Education and how it developed good interpersonal relationships.

The Committee were advised that this was the 2018/19 annual report and there would be a new syllabus brought to the Island in the Autumn of 2021. Funding would be accessed from a national level. Dr Hannam explained that there was a high quality of religious education taught across all schools on the Island. The Clerk to the Advisory Committee commented on the breadth of its work over the years and the enhanced engagement with all religions and faiths on the island.

The Committee thanked Dr Hannam for her attendance and the work undertaken by SACRE

RESOLVED:

THAT the SACRE annual report be formally noted.

5. **Workplan 2020-21**

The Scrutiny Officer indicated that it would be necessary to review the previously agreed workplan to reflect the impact of Covid-19 on service delivery. The Chairman would discuss with the cabinet member and officers the content of a revised workplan.

RESOLVED :

THAT a revised workplan be submitted to the next meeting.

CHAIRMAN